

After returning from a refugee camp Monday afternoon, the shaking began. It took several seconds for many of us to register what was happening. Although the earthquake seemed uncomfortably long, everything remained in its place. No one around us appeared too concerned, so neither were we; meanwhile, 30 miles away, the small village of Vrissa was practically leveled. In the days that followed, news reports from around the world would lead one to believe the entire island was in ruins.

This is certainly not the first time that media reports have presented an incomplete picture of the situation in Lesbos. Still today, news outlets use images from 2015 when refugees and migrants were landing on the island by the thousands... daily. We continue to see pictures of a shoreline crowded with boats and littered with life jackets. Today you will find no such scene. The beaches have been cleaned. The crisis is being, at least to some degree, managed.

The sensationalism of the media not only overshadows reality, but it also contributes to the difficulties faced on the island. Lesbos' economy is sustained in part by tourism, but while the migrants are coming, the tourists are not. Although many had hoped this year would be better than the last, recent reports of wide-spread damage from the earthquake have prompted a new wave of cancellations at hotels across the island. At the same time, well-meaning groups are providing aid with an incomplete assessment of the actual needs here on the ground. Their efforts to help unintentionally become a burden.

Aside from the service projects that we, The Global Humanitarian Student Initiative (GHSI) are conducting while in Lesbos, we are also taking the time to sit and listen to the people who have lived here all their lives as well as those who have come to provide humanitarian support. Among the groups that have taken the time to speak with us are Doctors Without Borders, Lesbos Solidarity, and a former United Nations representative. The massive migration of people from Asia and Africa has and will continue to change European and World History. The people of Lesbos are living this history. We have heard inspiring stories of residents defying authorities and freely giving what they have, but we have also heard stories of trauma, a word that is spoken here often. The refugees and migrants have experienced unimaginable trauma, while aid workers and volunteers struggle with secondary trauma and compassion fatigue.

Too often in our well-intentioned zeal for wanting to positively impact the world, service organizations focus on where to go and what to do, neglecting to observe the reality of these situations *prior* to acting. Taking the time to listen and understand the stories of those in traumatic situations can be just as important as treating illnesses or providing material support. The lessons GHSI is learning in Lesbos reaffirm our belief that being able to admit we are not experts and collaborating with others to identify needs are at the heart of being a global humanitarian.